

hateful faults as alien things to be got rid of, and holding them, in spite of the faults, in close measureless love and confidence, why, then, the young lives expand like flowers in sunny weather, and where parents know this secret of loving there are no morose boys nor sullen girls.

Actions do not speak louder than words to a young heart; he must feel it in your touch, see it in your eye, hear it in your tones, or you will never convince child or boy that you love him, though you labour day and night for his good and his pleasure. Perhaps this is the special lesson of Christmas-tide for parents. The Son came—for what else we need not inquire now—to reinstate men by *compelling* them to believe that they—the poorest shrinking and ashamed souls of them—that they live enfolded in infinite personal love, desiring with desire the response of love for love. And who, like the parent, can help forward this “wonderful redemption”? The boy who knows that his father and his mother love him with measureless patience in his faults, and love him out of them, is not slow to perceive, and receive, and understand the dealings of the higher Love.

But why should good parents, more than the rest of us, be expected to exhibit so divine a love? Perhaps because they are better than most of us; anyway, that appears to be their vocation. And that it is possible to fulfil even so high a calling we all know, because we know good mothers and good fathers.

Parents, love your children, is, probably, an unnecessary counsel to any who read this paper; at any rate, it is a presuming one. But let us say to reserved undemonstrative parents who follow the example of righteous Abraham and *rule* their households,—Rule none the less, but let your children feel and see and be quite sure that you love them.

We do not suggest endearments in public, which the young folk cannot always abide. But, dear mother, take your big schoolgirl in your arms just once in the holidays, and let her have a good talk, all to your two selves; it will be to her like a meal to a hungry man. For the youths and maidens—remember, they would sell their souls for love; they do it too, and that is the reason of many of the ruined lives we sigh over. Who will break down the partition between supply and demand in many a home where there are hungry hearts on either side of the wall?

THE TRUE STORY OF OTHELLO AND THE GOOSE.

A Tale for the Children.

BY MRS. FIRTH.

Mrs. Mirth and her daughter Merry live in a lovely home in the north of England. They have three maids; one grown up, called Letty, and two little ones called Polly and Dolly, who are being trained for useful work. They have a canary called Bonnivard, a beautiful yellow creature who sings happily in his imprisonment. Merry is devotedly attached to him, but Mrs. Mirth likes the free birds better; the tomtits, the robins, and the blackbirds, which are fed at the dining-room window with fat and bread crumbs in cold frosty weather when the dear little creatures find it hard to get their own living.

Then they have a most interesting black cat with a star of white under his chin and one white whisker amongst his black ones; he was given when a kitten to Merry by kind Mr. Frank, whose dear old friend Miss Mercy Goodwin suggested for it the name of “Othello.”

This lady had elder sisters who have now passed away, and she is familiarly known as “Miss Mercy” rather than by the more formal “Miss Goodwin.” Everyone likes the name because it so well describes her character. She has a love and pity for all suffering creatures, from the horse in poor pasture to the draggled hen or the vagrant cat; she has a sympathetic joy in the beauty and gladness of birds and animals, with a sensitive horror of cruelty and lack of consideration. She speaks in warm condemnation of the evil which is “wrought by want of thought as well as by want of heart.”

Mercy and truth meet together in her speech and in her life. Othello was very young when he was brought by Merry in a hamper to her home at Fir-tree Cottage, and Letty fed him with a spoon for a long time. She and Merry were in a state of high delight when the little creature, after stepping into the milk, first began to lick his paws; and when he upset his saucer,

his exploit was greeted with admiring laughter. He was petted and caressed, indulged with cream, and, as he grew up, with other dainties. When he became a big strong kitten he showed impatience in return for kind attentions, and made very successful efforts to scratch and bite his benefactors. So they let him alone for a while, and he became gentler. But he is still not fond of being taken up and nursed; he prefers liberty of choice, and selects the best cushion, or a central place on the softest hearthrug.

Letty talks to him a great deal, and if he does not answer he is always supposed to understand. When Mrs. Mirth was speaking of Mr. Frank one day in the presence of the cat, Letty kindly explained to him, "That's your dear master as was, my Othello."

He does not like company nor noise, and when strangers are about he gets into a drawer of the kitchen dresser and peeps out from his place of safety, unseen except by the family, who know his ways and leave the drawer a little open on purpose for him. His coat is very soft and glossy, and his tail is large and long. Letty and Merry declare that he is a half Persian, and they interpret all his ways and gestures with that sympathetic understanding which affection alone can give. This is the way Letty talks about him: "He is more like a Christian in his little habits; he gets ready at the table at meal-times as 'cute as if it was a child in his chair. When I am cutting up the meat for cooking, he touches my dress with his paw and looks up at me so 'pealingly, as much as to say, Is there not a bit for me? He knows the pan when I am going to boil some milk for him. But oh! ma'am, he doesn't like the milk-boy; he once hit him with a stone, and Othello always spits and snarls at him."

"How does he behave to the canary?" inquires Mrs. Mirth.

"Oh, ma'am, he wouldn't molest our home bird, but when I feed it and talk to it, and say 'Dick! Dick!' he gets angry and jealous, unless I give him something too. But if I only *talk* to Dick he shows no wish to interfere; he sits and looks, as much as to say, Go on, never mind me. I shall never forget his running after a squirrel on the bank in the summer, and feeding so pretty with a hedgehog at the same plate of bones. More than once I saw the pair of them, and they enjoyed it. He brought me in two young rats last week to show me what he does.

Smith (the gardener) says he does nothing, but he *does*! And he brings Miss Mirth's knitting into the kitchen, as much as to say, *I will play.*"

Much to the grief of the family, Othello kills robins also, and brings them in to show, or Dolly finds one, and says, "Please, ma'am, I found this poor little dead robin on the grassplot." But Miss Mercy says there is nothing to be done, and if *she* says so, there is no more to be said.

One night at bedtime the cat would not come in, but half an hour later, when he chose to mew at the back door, Polly was, of course, sent down out of bed to let him in. In some measure he may be regarded as master of the house. Merry says he always washes before he sleeps; indeed he has been known to fall asleep in the act, with his paw raised to his face. His more partial friends also maintain that he wants to go to church, because he tries to follow the various members of the family.

If Mrs. Mirth suggests that many of his proceedings are like those of any other cat, Letty says indignantly, "*No*, ma'am! I *never* saw one like our Othello! He doesn't forget my feeding him with a spoon."

On Christmas Day (his first Christmas) Mrs. Mirth and her daughter thought it would be more festive to be all together, and they dined in the kitchen with the maids. They had a goose for dinner—a good-sized one for their small party; everybody came twice and enjoyed it, and Othello had a plateful suited to his taste and capacity. They had plum pudding, of course, surrounded by flame, mince pies, and later, some dessert. Some time after dinner, when the maids had washed the dishes and put them away, Mrs. Mirth and Merry returned to the kitchen to roast some chestnuts; *they* jumped, and the little maids jumped, and everybody jumped. They had crackers, too, which cracked, or else didn't crack, not being properly pulled. And they had gifts, and cards, and carol-singing, and everything that rightly belongs to happy Christmas-time, with the delightful prospect of a Tree and a party of cottage neighbours on the morrow.

Polly and Dolly were kept up late; they played with and arranged their new treasures and they were really tired, only they did not know it. All too soon bed-time came, as bed-time will, even on the pleasantest occasions. "Good night" had been said and said again, the house was quiet, and the elders were in

different stages of undressing, when the sound of voices was heard in the front of the house, carol-singing! These good neighbours would have been welcome early in the evening; now, there was an agitated conference as to who could go to the door with thanks and a half-crown. No one was presentable, but finally Letty, in attire which required darkness to disguise it, went and made a kindly little speech.

As Mrs. Mirth and Merry were looking over the banisters to see her through the adventure they heard a "mi-ow." "Poor Othello! he is locked out," said Mrs. Mirth. "I think he's in the cellar," said Merry, anxiously.

"Mi-ow! Mi-ow," was repeated imperiously; the cellar door was opened and out he came.

"I'm afraid he'll have been down to the goose, and he'd an extra good dinner," said Letty, woefully. "I can't sleep unless I go down and see."

"You must *not* go down to-night, you will get so cold. Go to bed now, and ascertain in the morning," said her mistress; and all was soon again quiet for the night at Fir-tree Cottage.

In the morning Letty was more silent than usual. Merry was full of mournful misgiving. "I don't think you quite understand, mother," said she; "it is Othello's *character* we are so unhappy about."

She and Letty had always maintained that he was as honest as he was clean, that he would not *like* to jump on the dinner table and help himself, and that he had no *wish* even to go down the cellar steps into the larder. So they might well be depressed.

"Mother never would have a cat," said Merry to Letty; "she said she disliked having food licked at, and now I'm afraid she won't let me keep Othello!"

"I'm that vexed I don't know what to do," said Letty; "if missus doesn't keep him I shall be heart-broke."

Polly did not seem to care, though it was she who had carelessly let the cat into the cellar, but Dolly looked ready to cry.

After breakfast, Mrs. Mirth went into the kitchen to order dinner. "Now about the goose," she said. "It's here, ma'am," said Letty, despondently, raising a cloth. Its mangled remains were displayed on the dresser, and Letty pointed out with deep regret where Othello had begun and—very considerably—gone on. She said that cats always go on where they

commence, and corrected Mrs. Mirth's impression about the licking all over.

"Well, ma'am, am I to whip him?" asked Letty, sorrowfully, in compliance with her mistress's supposed wishes.

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Mirth, briskly; "he has forgotten all about it by this time, it would be cruel to punish him; it is cat-nature; he got a taste for goose at dinner-time; he was attracted by the smell, and thought he would like some for supper. Don't make a trouble of it, and don't let it spoil your thoughts of Christmas!"

Then the cloud lifted.

"He didn't want to stay in the cellar after he had had plenty," remarked Letty, irrelevantly; "then he *mi-ow-ed* to be let into the warm kitchen to sleep!"

Merry was immensely relieved.

"You mustn't do it again, darling," she said to Othello, who looked the picture of an approving conscience.

The goose agreed with him well; he had never presented a sleeker or better appearance; the family ate some of his leavings, and he had probably many subsequent feasts. He will most likely often dream of that goose, and recall the comfortable dinner when it was hot, the stealthy supper when it was cold, and wish in his waking hours, like many children, that Christmas cheer came every day.

Perhaps some persons who read this little story may unthinkingly have punished children or animals for things which they have done quite innocently, and with no sense of wrong-doing.

It is not just to regard only the mischief done, without considering the feelings and intentions of the offender.

In the Mosaic law sins of ignorance were separately dealt with, and not punished as wilful transgressions.

Yet we, some of us, whip our children for mistakes and errors which arise from their inexperience, and disappoint and grieve them by our displeasure when they have acted in good faith as far as their imperfect view of things would allow.

Also might we not take into more reasonable and pitiful consideration the strong pressure of temptation on the weak little soul of child or cat, even when it has a half feeling that it is doing wrong?

Thus may we that are strong bear the infirmities of the weak.